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an unheard-of word, which will generally be regarded as the most reckless type of conjecture, may claim at least that it has more chance of being right than any one would allow it at first glance. Ordinarily, to be sure, one will sooner acquiesce in an unintelligible traditional text than create by conjecture an equally unintelligible text; so we simmer down to Porson's "Conjectural readings are worth a farthing a cartload". But in the present instance the sense requires שָׁקַל and שָׁקַל lies before our eyes in the traditional text.

Ballard Vale, Mass.

Steven T. Byington

חֶשֶׁךְ

The Hebrew Lexicon under חֶשֶׁךְ cites Palmyrene Aramaic as using this word in the meanings given by Vogüé. Some users of the Lexicon may not have Vogüé at hand, and it is a safe guess that not every one who could get a look at Vogüé will take the look. It will not be superfluous, therefore, to set forth what I found when I looked up the texts.

The two occurrences that are cited are from bilingual honorific inscriptions for statues of men who have deserved this honor because each of them, among other merits, חֶשֶׁךְ certain moneys. The first presumption, to me, is that the word will have the same meaning in the two passages. Vogüé recognizes no such presumption, but gives quite dissimilar meanings, each of which he arrives at by rejecting the testimony of the Palmyrenes themselves as furnished by their Greek translation.

The Greek of inscription 15 translates חֶשֶׁךְ by ἀφειδήσαντα. Inscription 6 is defective, but according to Vogüé's restoration we should read ἀφειδήσαντι there also. Vogüé's note on 15 remarks that the meaning of חֶשֶׁךְ as shown by Hebrew usage is exactly contrary to ἀφειδήσαντα, and that the meaning φείδω, not ἀφειδέω, is congruous to the other statements about the man's services. But here is the same fallacy that one may observe sometimes in certain works of Biblical criticism, of starting from the text as if it were a free composition, and not observing that the author is likely to have been bound by the facts, whether actual or traditional, which he had to record.

If the man had actually deserved well by ἀφειδεῖν his own money, the inscription could do nothing but record that, even if his official position had given him opportunity to deserve well by φείδεν the public money.

In restoring ἀφειδήσαντι for the lacuna in 6, Vogüé shows that he does not assume the Greek word to have been any slip of the stone-cutter of 15; his assumption is therefore that in Palmyrene usage this word had the opposite of its natural Greek meaning. One expects, therefore, that he shall interpret it the same way in 6. But he does not; and indeed it would require some ingenuity, though hardly more ingenuity than he uses. That which the man חסך in 6 was a נור דנרין די דהב עתיקין תלת מאה, in Greek χρυσά παλαιά δηναρία τριακοσία ἀναλ[ωμ]α- [τ]ω[ν]. Vogüé notes “La formule דנרין עתיקין = δηνάρια παλαιά correspond à celle qui se trouve sur les médailles pour indiquer la remise faite par l’empereur de l’arriéré dû au fisc... On peut aussi la considérer comme ... *anciennes espèces*,... aurei du haut empire, d’un poids supérieur...” Despite his profession of uncertainty, he feels so sure of the former half of this note that without any other foundation, so far as I see, he conjectures for the word נור = ἀνάλωμα the meaning “debt”, and, as the end of the chain of inference, makes חסך here mean “remit”.

But if instead of taking all this interpretation as canonical we start from the modest-looking assumptions that the Palmyrenes understood the two languages of their city and that the same word will most probably have the same meaning when found in similar contexts, we may buttress these assumptions by remarking that the normal Greek meaning of ἀνάλωμα harmonizes beautifully with the normal Greek meaning of ἀφειδεῖν, and that both the men honored are perfectly likely to have been honored for “generously spending” their money in services to their fellows.

My conclusion is that if anybody feels himself to need more light on the meaning of חשך than the Hebrew Lexicon gives him, he will do well to read his Palmyrene texts in the original rather than in Vogüé’s translation.

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